



Cliff Walkup of Livermore



Bikers gather in the early morning fog to await the start of the race.



Photos by Thomas Ovalle

Challenge winner Matthew Sarna pedals to first place.

Challenging Diablo

Pedal pushers race 10 miles to summit

By James Rainey
Staff writer

MOUNT DIABLO — While most of the Bay Area slept off the work week late into Saturday morning, Matthew Sarna and some 275 others faced, and met, the Mountain Challenge.

Climbing 3,249 feet over 10.5 miles up Mount Diablo on a bicycle is no easy task. But most of the participants in the first major cycling event in the mountain's history were up to the task.

Sarna led the way. The 20-year-old Berkeley resident pulled into the summit parking lot just 50 minutes and 34 seconds after the start and three minutes ahead of his closest competitor.

But the idea of the Challenge, sponsored by The Herald and California Pedaler bicycle shops, was simply to finish — no matter what the time. Cyclers came from around the Bay Area and as far away as San Luis Obispo.

There were big cyclists, small cyclists and cyclists of every possible preference disposition. Some had come with their customized machines and sleek racing outfits, hoping to win the jersey for getting to the top first. Others wore cutoffs and pedaled strangely customized off-road bicycles. The free beer at the summit was the high point of their day.

John Jurczynski, 25, arrived from New York on his bicycle just a week ago. Some friends brought him out for a little ride up the

mountain, which he completed smoothly in just over an hour — while towing a trailer and his dog Blue Ridge.

"With about a mile left to go he (the dog) wanted to get out," Jurczynski said with a laugh. "I wanted him to get out too." After a moment to recover, the blonde New Yorker decided he might go all the way back down to do it again... without the dog.

Long after the winners had passed, Paul and Diane Thomas of Lafayette rode their tandem bike across the line and headed straight for the beer truck. Bruce Yip of Fremont, suffering from mechanical difficulties, picked his cycle up and carried it across the line. Others walked the last 150 yards — easily the steepest part of the entire course.

Oil Rennel, 50, looked ready for a ride around the block with his khaki slacks and wool sweater. But he sped past more stylishly clad cyclists and was the 41st man to the top, in 1:07:30.

Nancy Weber of Castro Valley, right behind Rennel, was the first woman to reach the 3,849-foot summit. "I've never ridden up this last thing before," Weber said, pointing to the last tortuous hill.

"My feet were locked in with the toe clips, so it was either keep going or fall."

Weber, an accomplished figure skater, was in her first competitive cycling event. She wore a sleek spandex jump-suit of her



A bike enthusiast works his way up Mount Diablo.

own design.

An unexpected surge of late registrants flooded the Athenian School in Danville just before race time. Riders were strung out for 100 yards behind the lead vehicle, waiting in chilly morning fog for

the start.

But soon after the event began at 6:15 a.m., the cyclists broke into the sun. Chris Robinson led a surge of riders from the California Pedaler that jumped quickly into the lead, but soon Sarna moved to

the front of the pack.

Tim Rei, 28, finished second in 53:31. He had never seen the stocky Sarna before. "It didn't surprise me that someone was in front of me," said Rei, who rides up the mountain once a week. "But

I didn't think that he would keep it up the whole way. He was an animal."

Sarna, riding for the Berkeley Bicycling Club, is in his first year of competitive cycling. He took fourth in a rally on Mt. Tamalpais.